

Parashat Vayeshev - Chanukah 5780, 2019:

“*Am’echa Yisrael*”

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yeziel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Al HaNissim is recited in the *Shemoneh Esrai* and *Birkat Hamazon* on the two rabbinically-enacted *chagim* of Chanukah and Purim. Chanukah’s version contains the expression “*am’echa Yisrael* — Your people, Israel.” In truth, we are no strangers to this term, as it appears each Shabbat in *Tefilat Minchah* for Shabbat: “*Atah echad v’shimchah echad, u’mi k’am’echa Yisrael* — You are one and Your essence is one, and who may be compared to Your people Israel?” What does it really mean to be Hashem’s people? One cannot help but think that this phrase conceals far more than it reveals.

We are very fortunate that my *rebbe* and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as “the Rav” by his students and followers, analyzed our expression in a public lecture delivered in Boston on December 18, 1971. (The following quotes are based upon my partial transcription of the *shiur*.) The Rav notes that *am’echa Yisrael* first and foremost means “we belong to Thee, even when we go astray, [and that] we are still committed to Thee even when we are guilty of certain offenses and certain sins.”

The Rav continues the theme of the indestructible link that eternally joins our people to the Master of the Universe by noting, “in *am’echa* what comes to expression is the old

idea, ‘*Yisrael af al pi sh’chata Yisrael hu*’ — A Jew, even when he sins, remains a Jew.” (Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 44a) What, in turn, does this maxim mean? The Rav analyzes it by first asking, “What did *Chazal* [our sages] want to express through this expression?” His answer goes a long way in helping us understand the authentic meaning of “*am’echa Yisrael*.”

It means that there is an eternal commitment in the Jew to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. Sometimes it is a conscious commitment, sometimes it is a non-conscious commitment, but there is a commitment...[and] that commitment is like a load resting upon the frail shoulders of every Jew...He might fight this commitment, he might hate this commitment — but there is a commitment on the part of every Jew.

For the Rav, *am’echa Yisrael* means that there is “compulsory belonging on the part of the Jew to G-d — willy-nilly he belongs to Him.” At this juncture, the Rav points out that we learn from the writings of Chabad that “the Jew has a natural love for G-d, an *ahavah tevayit* — whether he wants to love G-d, or does not want to love G-d.” This is based on “an instinctual drive, an urge to find G-d that is in the Jew.” As the founder of Chabad Chasidism, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi *zatzal* (1745-1812) states in his work, *Tanya* I:19, “There is an “*ahavah tevayit* of the divine soul that is found in all Jews, the intrinsic desire and will to be attached to its origin and source in the light of the *Ein Sof* (He who is without end).” For the Rav, therefore, the Jewish people’s natural love of, and search for, Hashem reflects the very essence of our being, and thereby represents what it ultimately means to be *am’echa Yisrael*.

With Hashem’s help and our most powerful desire, may we be *zocheh* (merit) to ever express our *ahavah tevayit* for Him as we continue our life-long journey to find His holy presence. *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom and *Chanukah Sameach!*

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>
They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria Etengoff and the *parasha*'s name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdb718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: [**http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpd**](http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpd)

*** I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.